

C.I.A. morale slumps after Athens killing

By RICHARD BEESTON in Washington

THE assassination of the C.I.A.'s station chief in Athens has dealt a new blow to the sagging morale of America's spy agency and brought instant notoriety to a group of Americans who first disclosed the murdered man's intelligence affiliations.

We emerged from obscurity overnight after we were attacked by the C.I.A. Director, William Colby," Mr. Tim Butz, a spokesman for the group, told me.

The group, called the Fifth Estate, had printed the name of the C.I.A.'s man in Athens, Richard Welch, in its publication, "Counterspy."

A former C.I.A. official, David Phillips, alleged that his subsequent murder was made inevitable by "the sordid practice of identifying American intelligence officers overseas."

Poky office

The Fifth Estate, which operates from a poky Washington office, responded that Mr. Welch's blood was on the hands of the C.I.A. since it was they who sent him to Athens. "The C.I.A. with its murders and tortures has now added the blood of one of its own," the Fifth Estate said.

Mr. Colby called this statement "a shocking attempt to use the death of a dedicated American as fuel for an irresponsible and paranoid attack on other Americans serving abroad."

In an interview yesterday Mr. Butz said the Fifth Estate grew out of the movement opposing the Vietnam war and the Watergate scandal, and was dedicated to exposing the C.I.A. and the "abuse of power" of the American government.

Mr. Butz said that Mr. Welch, who was listed as a diplomat in Athens, was operating only under "light cover" and that his "The only people who didn't know about him were the American public," he claimed.

Former agents

He said that among the members of the board of Fifth Estate were Philip Agee, a former C.I.A. officer now living in London who wrote a book exposing the names of agents, Anthony Russo, a former Rand Corporation employee, Victor Marchetti, another former C.I.A. official and author of a book on the C.I.A., and Vietnam war opponents David Dellinger and Mark Lane.

The group, he said, closely studied C.I.A. appointments and the appointment of Mr. Cord Meyer as C.I.A. station chief in London came as no surprise to them.

For the past few months Mr. Colby has been appealing desperately to Congressional committees investigating the agency not to disclose C.I.A. names, operations and sources, which could endanger the lives of agents operating abroad.

The assassination of Mr. Welch came just after a morale-building tour of Western Europe by Gen. Vernon Walters, the C.I.A. Deputy Director. He is keenly aware of the demoralisation among C.I.A. agents caused by attacks in Congress and Press reports about past C.I.A. misdeeds.

Arlington burial

President Ford yesterday waived restrictions to permit burial of Mr. Welch in Arlington National Cemetery normally reserved for members of the armed forces. In Vail, Colorado, where Mr. Ford is taking a skiing holiday, his press secretary Mr. Ron Nessen, reported Mr. Ford as saying that Mr. Welch "certainly died in the service of his country."

He said that Mr. Ford felt that recent articles identifying Welch as the C.I.A. Chief in Greece may have been "partly responsible for his murder."

The Greek Government yesterday banned any reference to the assassination to stop speculation that could harm Greek relations with America. Greek newspaper reports had suggested that Mr. Welch was killed by the C.I.A. to stop investigations into its activities.